

*“The groups that visit all have the same goal as the TCEQ—to get this right.”*

— Tony Walker, TCEQ Dallas–Fort Worth Regional Director



# TCEQ HOSTS INTERNATIONAL VISITORS INTERESTED IN SHALE PRODUCTION

*Groups learn about agency's regulatory role in oil and gas drilling*

**I**n 2009, there were a total of 67 producing gas wells in the Eagle Ford Shale, a massive 50-mile-wide area that extends from Leon County, just north of Bryan–College Station, all the way to Laredo, in Webb County, 335 miles away.

Last year—only two years later—there were 368 producing wells.

The increasing oil and gas production in these rich underground formations, as well as the extensive gas production in the 24-county Barnett Shale area in the Dallas–Fort Worth region, has caught the attention of a worldwide audience interested in increasing their own energy independence.

Over the past two years, the TCEQ has hosted delegations from ten nations—Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Jordan, Poland, Turkmenistan, Spain, and the United Kingdom—keen to learn about the environmental management of oil and gas drilling in shale formations, as they develop their own energy resources.

## Experience to Share

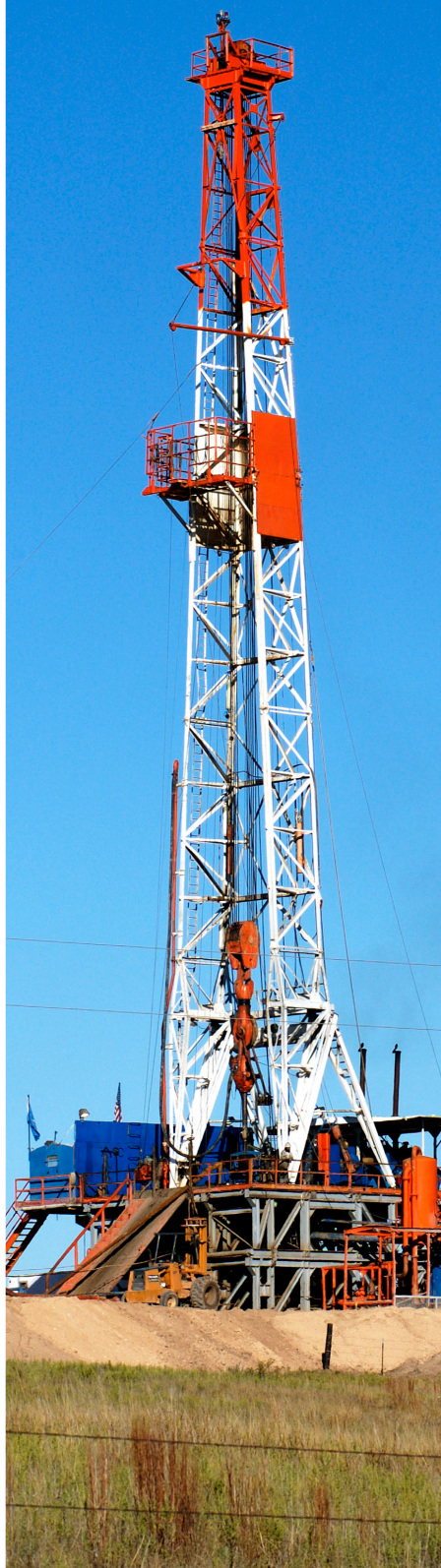
Steve Niemeyer, manager for Border Affairs at the TCEQ, has helped organize some of the visits arranged through the U.S.

Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program. Locally, the TCEQ is contacted by Global Austin, a non-profit organization used by the Department of State to set up visits. Delegations are invited to meet with representatives from the TCEQ's Chief Engineer's Office, including Keith Sheedy, who provides technical briefings to the visiting groups.

“The work the TCEQ has been doing with shale production is especially of interest to our visitors—mainly because it's so complex,” Sheedy says. “In the Barnett Shale region alone, there are six million people living in the area where the drilling is going on. We're able to show them that, through diligent monitoring and timely response to all complaints, urban gas production is possible.”

## A Keen Audience

Sheedy says the international audiences have been impressed with the agency's efforts to address storage-tank emissions in the Barnett Shale region employing helicopter-mounted Hawk technology, which uses an infrared camera to detect hydrocarbon compounds.



"I think they are amazed at the number of wells we have in the Barnett Shale, the number of people living in the area, and the fact that we do not see any general air quality problem," added Sheedy. "They seem to be very impressed with the amount of monitoring that we have done, along with the number of stationary monitors we have already installed, and are planning to install."

"The show-and-tell portion of the presentations allows us to give the visitors a hands-on look at all of the tools we have, including our handheld devices, which successfully monitor air quality in oil and gas production regions," said Niemeyer.

"Our visit went well, mainly thanks to the warm welcome we received from the TCEQ," said Sandrine Messenger, an environmental analyst with the Bureau d'Audiences Publiques sur l'Environnement (BAPE) in Québec. "The people we met were happy to share their knowledge and experience, and our Commission of Inquiry was able to understand the issues at stake."

After the group's visit, BAPE made recommendations to Québec's Ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment, and Parks, which adopted a number of transitional measures related to shale gas production in the state.

## Diverse Destinations

Visits are not just limited to TCEQ headquarters in Austin. Delegations from China, India, Jordan, and Poland traveled to the Metroplex to meet with Tony Walker, director of the TCEQ's Dallas-Fort Worth regional office.



TCEQ photo by Laurie Fleet

**On March 2, the TCEQ hosted a delegation from Turkmenistan, visiting the agency to learn about the state's regulatory role in oil and gas exploration. (L to r) Steve Niemeyer, TCEQ Intergovernmental Relations; Hajimuhammed Nurmamedov; Ella Lungwitz, interpreter; Vadim Samsonov, interpreter; Gurbangeldi Garlyyev; Durdymyrat Atadurdyev; Keith Sheedy, TCEQ Chief Engineer's Office; and Yazguly Gayypov.**

"When they visit the region, we provide a presentation on monitoring, investigations, and rule-making," said Walker. "The groups seem very interested in our 12-hour response time for all complaints received in the Barnett Shale region—as well as our periodic reconnaissance investigations."

"The groups that visit all have the same goal as TCEQ—to get this right. That's why it was important for them to hear about the lessons we learned along the way, when it came to our role in shale gas production. Transparency and communication were key lessons learned."

## A Complex Regulatory System

"The visits allow the agency to explain the complex regulatory system with

oil and gas production," Niemeyer emphasized. "The TCEQ is only a part of the process. That said, we've made it clear to the groups we've hosted that while we regulate emissions, it is the Railroad Commission that authorizes the drilling part of the production, and that the local governments, along with the federal government, also play a part in the regulatory role."

"When it comes to regulating oil and gas drilling in shale formations, our state is the leader," Sheedy states. "And as shale exploration continues around the globe, we're certain to have additional international delegations paying us a visit to learn about what we're doing in Texas." 🇺🇸



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